

Earth Day 2012



Career Profile

Name: Kristopher Gilham
Job Title: Air Quality Specialist & Emergency Response Team member
Location: Reading District Office, Southcentral Region
Years with DEP: 4 ½

What kinds of activities do you perform on a daily basis?

I conduct annual inspections of air pollution sources such as quarries, foundries, lead smelters, woodworking and painting operations, cement manufactures, power plants and other combustion sources. I also respond to environmental emergencies as a member of the Emergency Response Team. I investigate complaints dealing with smoke, open burning, diesel idling, fugitive emissions and malodors. I conduct asbestos remediation and demolition inspections as well as review compliance certifications and emissions reports from facilities. Finally, I service the lead air sampling network in Berks County.

What kind of educational background do you have?

I have a bachelor's degree in geosciences from Penn State.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

Dealing with complainants who are either unhappy with the results of our investigations, or want us to do more than we are able, is one of the most challenging aspects of my job. Also, dealing with individuals or companies who do not want to abide by the regulations can be a challenge at times.

What got you interested in working in an environmental field?

Growing up, I spent a lot of time with my grandfather. He was a high school biology and ecology teacher, as well as an environmental education professor at Penn State. What I learned from him and from time spent in the outdoors piqued my interest in different environmental fields, which lead to my major in college and a desire to work in a vocation that protected our natural resources.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

Problem-solving. In air quality, I enjoy the challenge of helping a facility that is having problems with their emissions, discovering where the trouble is occurring and assisting in the correction of its problem.

When on a call with the Emergency Response Team, I can be dealing with any sort of pollution problem from chemical spills and releases to radiation. The challenge here is to determine the best course of action to prevent the spread of the pollutant and to protect the environment and people's lives.

What advice do you have for someone thinking about a career in environmental science?

Make sure you have a good background in chemistry. In just about every environmental occupation, you will be dealing with chemical interactions and what influences those interactions.